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Mary Ann Siller of The American Federation for the Blind wrote in an article titled Career Education for Students with Visual Impairments that one of the most critical periods in the life of any young person is the transition from school to employment and adulthood, particularly for those students whose transition is complicated by their disability. Ms. Siller added a statement I found even more significant for our students who are visually impaired. She wrote that all students go through a career development process, which provides a plan for life as an adult. That process includes career awareness, exploration, preparation, and placement activities. For the student who is blind or has limited vision, the visual nature of traditional career education development presents numerous obstacles. Since the majority of what we know about our surroundings is processed through the sense of sight, the loss of vision requires that experiences and concepts be systematically and sequentially taught to our students who do not have the benefit of learning through incidental observations. Ms. Siller closed with discussion around the dire fact that less than 1/3 of the working-age visually impaired U.S. population is in the labor force.

For our students, the Division for Visual Impairment provides transition services. Elizabeth, who is totally blind, did not have a transition counselor as a part of her IEP team until last year, and only after I insisted. The Educational Diagnostician did not know that the transition counselor would come from DVI and the teacher for the visually impaired did not make the recommendation, likely because she, herself, was unaware of the requirement. Furthermore the schools and the transition providers do not have an agreement on when it is appropriate to implement the services into the IEP process.

Transition is a considerable inefficiency for the IEP process that must be specifically addressed in terms of timing, variations, and providers. For the students who are blind or visually impaired, it is, as Ms. Siller related, not enough to merely discuss appropriate work related attributes; these students must be offered the experiences and they must have access early.

I urge you to recommend a task force resolution for students who are blind and visually impaired as a part of the IEP task force solutions.